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DR. WILLIAM F. EDGAR.

BY H. D. BARROWS.

[Read October 4, 1897.]

Again is our society called upon to mourn the decease of one of its honored members. Dr. William Francis Edgar died at his home on Washington street, this city, August 23, 1897, at the age of 73 years.

Dr. Edgar was born in Jessamine county, Ky., in 1823, but moved with his parents when a boy to Missouri. He was graduated from the University of Louisville in 1848, and was commissioned as assistant surgeon in the army, March 2, 1849. He was assigned to a regiment of Mounted Rifles, which was ordered to Oregon. The command reached Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia River, in July, 1850, remaining there a few months, a portion of the officers, mean while, being ordered East on recruiting service, the remainder of the regiment being transferred to the First Dragoons, under command of Maj. Philip Kearney, who had orders to organize an expedition by land to California. This expedition, after subduing the hostile Rogue River Indians, reached Benicia, Cal., the last of July, 1851; from there it went and joined the force at Sonoma, where there were stationed at that time Capt. (afterward Gen.) Joe Hooker; Maj. (afterward Gen.) Philip Kearney; Lieut. Derby, the gentle, genial humorist, who afterward was so well known by the old residents of San Diego, and who acquired a national reputation as "John Phoenix," and also two old Los Angelesños, namely, Lieut. (afterward Gen. and Governor) George Stoneman, and Dr. John S. Griffin. Of all that notable band of heroic officers, now that Dr. Edgar has just passed away, only the venerable pioneer, Dr. Griffin, already past four score, still survives.

In the latter part of 1851, Dr. Edgar was ordered to Camp (since Fort) Miller.

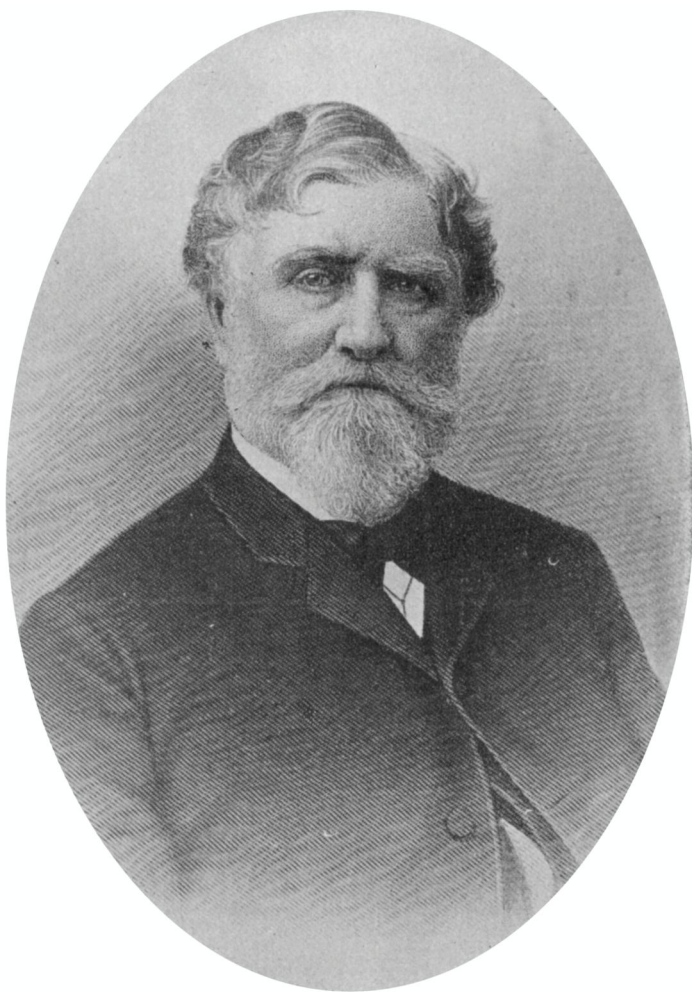
[NOTE: In the years 1890 and '91, Dr. Edgar contributed to our society a series of papers, recounting his experiences as an officer of the army in pioneer times at the various frontier forts of the Pacific Coast. These very interesting reminiscences were printed

in the annual publication of the society for 1893. There is also a sketch of Dr. Edgar's life, as dictated to the writer hereof, by himself, in the *Illustrated History of Los Angeles County*.]

In 1854, Dr. Edgar, as a member of a company of the First Dragoons, assisted in the establishment of Fort Tejon, which for many years was a very important frontier fort. A pathetic incident occurred about this time, which had a far-reaching influence on the Doctor's future, which I cannot forbear recounting here. One night in December, while camping in his tent under a tree, he was called from a sick bed to go out in the mountains in a blinding snow and sleet-storm to attend a wounded man of the fort. The night was dark and the ground slippery, causing his horse to lose his footing, whereby the doctor was seriously injured. At last, the man was found; one of his legs had been broken. A stretcher was improvised, and two men and the doctor carried him a couple of miles to an abandoned Indian hut, where his wound was dressed. The doctor returned to the fort about daylight, wet, cold and exhausted. Directly after his arrival at the fort, he was stricken with paralysis of the entire left side. Some four months after he was able to walk and speak, and, with a servant to assist him, he was ordered East on a three-months' leave of absence. Although Dr. Edgar lived many years afterward in apparent good health and performed complex and valuable services for the government, as an army officer, it is doubtful if he ever entirely recovered from the effects of his exposure and hurt on that terrible, stormy night in the Tejon Mountains.

On the expiration of his leave of absence, he reported for duty at Jefferson barracks, when he was ordered (with the Second Cavalry) to Texas and then to Florida, and from there, with a lot of invalid soldiers, to New York Harbor; and the next year, 1857, he returned with recruits to the Pacific Coast and to Fort Miller again. Afterward he went with troops to Oregon to quell Indian disturbances. The force was under Capt. Ord, whose name is not only famous in the history of his country as a soldier, but also in the early history of Los Angeles as the author of the first important official survey of the central portion of the city.

After being stationed a while at the San Francisco Presidio and at Benicia, Dr. Edgar was ordered to join an expedition, in 1858, that was to start from Los Angeles against the Mojave Indians. This was the first time he saw Los Angeles. After the Mojaves were conquered and a treaty of peace had been made, a part of the com-



DR. WILLIAM F. EDGAR.

mand remained to garrison Fort Mojave and the other part returned to Los Angeles and camped near the present site of Compton; and Dr. Edgar was ordered to San Diego, where he remained till November, 1861, when, with the balance of the regular troops on this Coast, he was ordered East to take part in the War of the Rebellion.

Dr. Edgar remained some time with the Army of the Potomac, and then was ordered to Buell's army in Kentucky, where he soon was engaged in organizing a large general hospital in Louisville, which he had charge of until his assignment as medical director at Cairo, where, from want of rest or incessant labor and from the oppressive climate of summer, he had a partial relapse of the former paralysis, which, with other troubles, rendered him unfit for the field at the time, and he was ordered before a retiring board in Washington. On examination he was retired from active service in the field. After recovering from the effects of a severe surgical operation he was assigned to duty in the medical director's office in the Department of the East, and a part of the time he was a member of a board to organize the Signal Corps in Washington. At the close of the war he was assigned the duty of disposing of the effects of the general hospitals of that department, and closing them up. After this he was again ordered to the Pacific Coast, and was stationed at Drumm barracks, Los Angeles county, in 1866, where he remained three years. Finding his health giving way, he was relieved from military duty one year, and he retired to his ranch at San Geronio, San Bernardino county, and while there Congress passed a law (January, 1870,) which provided that officers retired from active service should be relieved from all duty.

After remaining at his ranch a year or two, and his health improving, he came to Los Angeles and practiced his profession nearly five years. Since 1886, having sold his ranch, he made his home in Los Angeles till his death. After all his travels and explorations, he assured the writer that he considered Los Angeles the choice spot of the Pacific Coast, and of the entire country.

In 1865, Dr. Edgar was married to Miss Catherine L. Kennefick, a native of New York City, who survives him. The union was an ideal one, as all who were at all intimately acquainted with Dr. and Mrs. Edgar, will agree. About two and a half years ago Dr. Edgar suffered another and third paralytic stroke, which rendered him both helpless and speechless, and from which he never recovered, though his mind remained clear to the last. The tender, sympathetic care

he received from his devoted wife during his last sickness immeasurably mitigated his affliction, if it did not effectively tend to prolong his life.

Dr. Edgar was a scholar and an earnest student, a thorough man of the world, a warm-hearted, genial gentleman, and an accomplished physician and surgeon. A considerable portion of his life was spent in the service of his country in the regular army. He was held in the highest estimation by his brother officers, as well as by civilians wherever he was known. His funeral was largely attended by the old-timers; his body was attired in the uniform of an officer of the United States army; on the coffin rested the beautiful sword presented to him many years ago by Gen. Phil. Kearney, and after his close friend, Dr. J. P. Widney, had pronounced a fitting and appreciative eulogy, and the friends present and his widow overwhelmed with grief, had taken a last look, his mortal remains were taken to Rosedale Cemetery, where, after "taps" had been sounded—"Good-night, good-night, good-night!"—they were deposited in their last resting place, their final home within the bosom of Mother Earth.

His spirit, we may hope, has risen to a higher and more ethereal sphere, where the possibilities of the soul's progress and development are, and, from the nature of things, must be altogether beyond mortal conception!

As was said by the intimate friends of the late Rev. Mr. Birdsall at his death, so I think it can be said with truth by those who knew Dr. Edgar intimately: "We really loved that man!"

Dr. Edgar during his residence in Southern California of over thirty years, mostly at Los Angeles, won the respect and genuine friendship of all who knew him well.

His sterling qualities, his eminent services as assistant medical director of the army in the civil war and his long and faithful services on the frontier, as well as his generous benefactions, are certainly worthy of being commended without reservation to all the world.